

# **Procedures and Activities for the Establishment and Maintenance of a Comprehensive System of Personnel Development (CSPD)**

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## **State Unified Plan**

The Unified State Plan section titled "Professional Development and Systems Improvement" requires descriptions of how the state develops personnel to achieve the performance indicators for the programs in the plan. State plan attachment 4.11(b) of the public vocational rehabilitation plans describe the policies, procedures, and activities that vocational rehabilitation maintains to ensure an adequate supply of qualified rehabilitation professionals and para-professionals as partner agencies in the implementation of workforce investment activities in South Dakota. The VR training officer and HRD specialist is a member of a workgroup that includes all workforce investment partner programs for training and personnel development purposes. In addition, qualified professional staff are assigned responsibility to the local one-stop council levels to train partner agencies in the roles and parameters of public vocational rehabilitation in the Career Center system. All personnel matters concerning public vocational rehabilitation are under the strict authority of the designated state units to include hiring, supervision, training, and development.

## **Comprehensive System of Personnel Development**

The Division of Rehabilitation Services (DRS) has implemented a number of strategies to ensure trained staff is delivering quality services to applicants and consumers with whom division personnel work. Currently one employee is primarily responsible for activities related to the comprehensive system of personnel development. This employee is also responsible for other management duties in the designated state unit for delivery of services to individuals who are blind.

## **Data System**

The current system to collect and analyze data related to qualified personnel needs and personnel development consists of two components. The South Dakota Bureau of Personnel (BOP) maintains a database of all training activities attended by Division staff including BOP training, seminars, workshops, conferences, and undergraduate and graduate level courses supported by the Division. Individual offices maintain files on educational backgrounds, training activities and goals and plans of employee's to meet the agency requirements within eight years to become qualified Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors and Certified Rehabilitation Counselor Certification (CRCC). Supervisors are required to address training needs as a part of the annual employee evaluation. Individual training needs are reported to the Training Officer to be considered in the implementation of results from the annual training needs assessment.

The Division utilizes a web based management information system (VR FACES) for data tracking of the CSPD for staff. The VR FACES tracks all the employees of the Division, their office structure, race, supervisor, disability, job classification, and other relevant information to the position. The system also tracks if VR Counselors are a Certified Rehabilitation Counselor (CRC) or their development plan to become CRC. Input of information is required of individual employees and supervisors with access to all information by the Training Officer and other management staff. This system is more efficient for addressing individual training needs as well as projecting for future personnel and training priorities and progress of staff toward meeting CSPD requirements. The following table identifies current staffing patterns for the Division of Rehabilitation Services.

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<b>Type of Position</b>	<b>DRS FFY 2005 FTE</b>	<b>DRS FFY 2008 FTE</b>	<b>Projected Growth Per year for 3yrs.</b>
<b>Clerical</b>	10.5	10.5	0
<b>Counselor Aides</b>	5.75	5.75	0
<b>VR Counselors</b>	36.5	36.5	0
<b>Supervisors</b>	5	5	0
<b>Management</b>	6	6	0
<b>Other</b>	4	4	0
<b>Total</b>	67.75	67.75	0

Current staffing patterns include the following: Clerical – Secretaries, Senior Secretaries and Administrative Assistants; Support - Counselor Aides; Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors - entry level VR counselors and senior level VR counselors; Supervisors - District Supervisors, Management – Division Director, Assistant Director, VR Specialist, IL Program Specialist, Rehabilitation Engineer and Deaf Services Specialist. The “Other” category refers to: Rehabilitation Teachers at the Goal Achievement Program (2) and interpreters (2),

For FFY 2005, the ratio of counselors compared to applicants and eligible individuals served is an average 180 consumers per counselor. The remaining active caseload as of 10/01/2005 was an average of 108 active consumers per caseload. The Division did not experience an increase in active cases as South Dakota began the Ticket to Work program. However an increase was experienced as a result of a decreased economy. It is the goal of the Division of Rehabilitation to remain under the ratio of 1:125 active consumers per counselor. When non VR Counselor positions become vacant, the Division may replace the position with a counselor.

### **Personnel Standards**

Working in conjunction with the Bureau of Personnel, the Division has established minimum standards for vocational rehabilitation counselors, senior vocational rehabilitation counselors and district supervisors. These standards are reviewed periodically in light of changing personnel needs, labor market supply and training resources. The Division relies on state standards for secretary, counselor aide and program administrator positions. These are generic job classifications within the state Bureau of Personnel system. The Division does establish specific knowledge skills and ability requirements in order for individuals to enter these positions.

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Standards for Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor:

Newly hired rehabilitation counselors are required to have a master's degree that will lead towards CRC certification or if they possess only a bachelor degree, each new hire must agree to pursue a master's degree as a condition of employment. The Division does support costs associated with pursuit of master's degrees. Funds for support of employees to a master's level consists of RSA stipends, in-service training money and program 110 funds. Once entry level counselors have accomplished obtaining a master's degree and CRC certification, they can request a promotion to Senior Rehabilitation Counselor.

Standards for Senior Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor:

The Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor is a Certified Rehabilitation Counselor (CRC) by the Commission of Rehabilitation Counselor Certification (CRCC) and they have demonstrated the ability to work independently in developing Individual Plans for Employment.

Standards for District Supervisors:

Currently all District Supervisors meet the requirements for a Senior Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor. Meeting this standard is preferred but not required for a District Supervisor. District Supervisors must have experience in working with people with disabilities, knowledge of the vocational rehabilitation program, and must have the ability to manage a budget, personnel and office operations.

The Rehabilitation Act as amended and the Vocational Rehabilitation regulations refer to personnel as "Qualified Personnel" and "Qualified Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors". The Division has defined these positions as follows:

Qualified Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor:

All Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors, District Supervisors and State Office Personnel who

- a. meets the standards for Senior Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor;
- b. meets the standards for Senior Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor except is not CRC certified; or
- c. meets the standards for Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor; has been employed by the Division as a VR Counselor for a minimum of six months; and has a approved plan to be eligible to take the CRC certification test by the Commission on Rehabilitation Counselor Certification in five years.

The approved plan must be signed by the Supervisor. The plan will include at a minimum of one course each semester unless the individual can present extenuating circumstances that are approved by the State Office.

The following table shows the status of Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors in the Division as of 10/1/2005. All five District Supervisors meet the requirements of "Qualified VR Counselor" and their information is included below:

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<b>Total VR Counselors &amp; Supervisors</b>	<b>Currently Vacant</b>	<b>VR Counselors</b>	<b>VR Supervisors</b>
42 Positions	0	37	5

The following table shows the status as of 10/1/2005 of the number of individuals who meet the requirements of "Qualified Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor".

<b>Not Qualified VR Counselors</b>		<b>Qualified VR Counselors</b>	
<b>Bachelors Degree *</b>	<b>Masters Degree*</b>	<b>Plan for CRC</b>	<b>CRC</b>
1	0	20	21
			Senior VR Counselor Qualifications

\* Identifies individuals who do not have a plan to meet the standard of a Senior VR Counselor or have not met the required length of employment.

#### Qualified Personnel:

This category of individuals includes all Counselor Aides and all VR Counselors who are not "Qualified VR Counselors".

<b>Total Qualified Personnel</b>	<b>Counselor Aides</b>	<b>VR Counselors who do not meet the "Qualified VR Counselor Requirement"</b>
8 Positions	6	2

### **Staff Development**

The Division is committed to assist vocational rehabilitation counselors to obtain the necessary academic training and professional experience to meet the standards of a Senior Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor. During FFY 2005, 19 DRS employees were pursuing their Master's degree program through Montana State University, University of Northern Colorado or University of Little Rock Arkansas. Three individuals graduated during the past year with a masters in vocational rehabilitation and became certified as a Rehabilitation Counselor. Another important strategy is coordination of resources to access the most comprehensive training opportunities. Resources include in-service training; RCEP sponsored training, cooperation for training with other organizations (i.e. Department of Labor, Department of Education, and professional organizations such as Association for Professionals in Supported Employment. The last element of this plan is the development of a career ladder that will reward staff for professional development.

In prior years, the Division of Rehabilitation Services has approached personnel development through a number of avenues. Each employee's current level of education and training, as well as short term and long term training needs are tracked by supervisors who evaluate methods for addressing these needs annually through the Performance Planning and Review System (PPAR). Individual training needs assessments are conducted to evaluate current levels of education, understanding of fundamentals of vocational rehabilitation, disability-related issues, professional

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development and related topics. Self evaluation and supervisor input and recommendation sections on the PPAR assist in assessing needs for training which may be pursued through a number of approaches. The results of the assessments are recorded for individuals, groups of related positions (i.e. rehabilitation counselors, supervisors, managers, clerical etc.) and for the agency as a whole.

The PPAR system allows for ongoing feedback between employees and, supervisors by incorporating a self audit while addressing professionalism, work quality and areas for development as well as areas of strength. Training needs are addressed utilizing a form that not only identifies needed training, but also includes fields for the date the training is scheduled and the date it is attended. BOP workshops are identified under the following headings: supervisory, job enrichment and technology with “other training” and “job-specific skills” also included in the document used to track need and attendance. The training officer works with agency supervisors to identify resources for obtaining training in areas related to vocational rehabilitation (including the Rehabilitation Act Amendments of 1998, Workforce Investment Act and RSA regulations), including serving individuals with the most significant disabilities and those of minority backgrounds. Training needs are also identified through input from consumers responding to satisfaction surveys and input from the State Rehabilitation Council.

Cooperation with other entities in state government such as the Department of Labor, Department of Health and the Department of Education, ensures that training opportunities are available which address topics relevant to the field of rehabilitation. Staff have access to intensive training which applies to serving individuals with disabilities. These conferences and/or seminars are also an opportunity to collaborate with other entities who deliver services to individuals with disabilities. One example is an annual Career Center Symposium accomplished by the South Dakota Department of Labor (DOL). Twenty-five professional staff from the division will attend this conference to learn more about workforce investment and labor information. In addition, vocational rehabilitation personnel regularly provide training concerning considerations when working with individuals with disabilities to DOL employees. Paraprofessional staff (i.e. counselor aides and clerical staff) are offered ongoing training in word processing and other software applications as well as office related courses such as effective writing, organization skills, etc., through the Bureau of Personnel. Courses specific to the vocational rehabilitation management information system and requirements specific to vocational rehabilitation are offered through in-service training sessions usually taught by agency specialty staff.

Leadership development and capacity building are addressed through distance learning courses as well as agency sponsored training sessions. Assistive technology training is available through DakotaLink, the state’s assistive technology systems change project, the DRS Rehabilitation Engineer or the State Bureau of Information and Technology (for employees with disabilities who utilize assistive technology on the job). Annual training conferences address current research through contracting with national Rehabilitation Research and Training Centers (RRTC’s) to address specific topics identified in the annual training needs assessment. Training on the final regulations was provided in the spring of 2001. Cooperative agreements are in place with the state’s four Native American Vocational Rehabilitation Projects (Section 121’s) and the Native American Independent Living Project to provide training to staff on cultural diversity. Ongoing training is provided to address informed choice as it relates to agency policies and practices. The State Rehabilitation Council recommends strategies that have been implemented for addressing informed choice in the rehabilitation process.

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## **Recruitment and Retention of Qualified Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors**

The average turnover rates for Rehabilitation Counselors is 5.5% while the Sr. Rehabilitation Counselors is 11% for a five-year period. The Sr. Counselor rate is higher because of retirements. South Dakota anticipates the need to recruit at least 12 Qualified VR Counselors in the next five-year period. This includes vacancies for four vocational rehabilitation counselors who are eligible for retirement in the next five years. There are no post secondary institutions that offer masters degrees in rehabilitation counseling in the state. Recruitment of qualified staff is accomplished through promoting vacancies at universities in Region VIII with Masters level programs. The University of Colorado at Greeley and Utah State University are sources for recruitment of graduates with master's level degrees in vocational rehabilitation counseling. In addition, South Dakota has three State public Universities with programs offering master degrees in counseling. These three State Universities have expanded their class locations to other universities and distance learning options. Graduates of the following programs are recruited for vocational rehabilitation counselor openings: Doctorate of Education program options, Counselor of Education and Counseling Practice; School Psychology and Educational Psychology, Mental Health Counseling, or Master of Arts in Counseling or Educational Psychology. Graduates are hired and trained to prepare for the CRCC to meet the highest qualifications in the state for rehabilitation counselors. During the next five years, it is projected that up to 6 counselors will be hired who are graduates of these programs.

Retention and advancement are accomplished through the opportunity for all entry-level vocational rehabilitation counselors to participate in masters level vocational rehabilitation education programs, and, once meeting the requirements for "Senior Counselor", receive promotion to this level. Leadership and management training and assignments with senior level management teams assist counselors to prepare for supervisory and administrative positions. Senior rehabilitation counselors are encouraged to apply for management and administrative positions when there are vacancies. Promotional opportunities are available through announcing supervisory and management positions so those candidates must be employees of the designated state unit when there are qualified individuals who meet the requirements for the positions.

To address the priority of recruiting individuals with disabilities and from minority backgrounds, the South Dakota Bureau of Personnel has in administrative rule the requirement that individuals with disabilities or minority backgrounds are automatically certified applicants to be interviewed. In addition, any eligible applicant for employment who has been certified severely disabled by a rehabilitation counselor will be certified (eligible to interview) regardless of the ranking the applicant receives compared to other applicants. This ensures that individuals who have disabilities or are minorities have the opportunity to interview and compete for openings in the designated state unit.

## **Communication with Diverse Populations**

Interpreters are available for all training sessions as well as to consumers who are deaf or deaf/blind. The Department of Human Services employs sign language interpreters to be available to vocational rehabilitation consumers and staff. If additional interpreters are needed, the Division contracts for these services. Braille, materials on disk and enlarged print are provided to all staff or

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consumers who request alternative formats. The Division has developed fee schedules and vendors to pay for interpreters of foreign languages and Native American interpreters.

### **Coordination of the CSPD and In-service Training**

Training on IDEA and transition services for students with disabilities is coordinated with the State Division of Special Education and the State Transition Project. Currently the third annual Youth Leadership Forum is being planned through collaboration of the State Divisions of Special Education, Rehabilitation Services, Service to the Blind and Visually Impaired and the Governor's Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities, the Statewide Independent Living Council and the State Transition Project.

The Division has established liaison relationships and cooperative agreements with the other partner agencies that are included in the Workforce Investment Act and the State Unified Plan. The training officer is on a work group with other agency's training officers to plan joint training initiatives. The Director of DRS as a member of the state's Workforce Investment Council deals with training issues system wide.

Training needs of the state's Native American Vocational Rehabilitation Programs, Centers for Independent Living, the Client Assistance Program and Community Based Rehabilitation Programs are also gathered and reported to the Region VIII RCEP's and considered in planning annual training activities. As previously stated, training needs are addressed through a variety of resources. In-service training, activities supported by the Rehabilitation Continuing Education Programs in Regions VIII (the General and CRP RCEP's), workshops, conferences and seminars hosted by other organizations such as Special Education, Department of Labor, Bureau of Personnel training, professional organizations ( APSE, and etc.), consumer organizations (SD Coalition of Citizens with Disabilities, SD Association of the Blind, National Federation of the Blind of SD, SD Association of Community Based Services and the SD Association of the Deaf), and distance learning are examples of sponsors of training activities in which staff participate. Independent study and mentoring by supervisors and senior rehabilitation counselors are other means for meeting individual staff development needs.

### **State Rehabilitation Council**

The State Rehabilitation Council is included in the preparation and writing of the state plan and related policies and procedures. The Board of DRS is consulted in the development of the plan and has the opportunity to review and provide input into the draft pre print and attachments prior to submission to RSA. In addition, Board members participate in and assist with facilitation at annual public meetings. Results from the statewide training needs assessments are shared with the Board for their input and advice. Board members are invited to agency training sessions and conferences.